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ÆSTHETICS

IN

WORSHIP



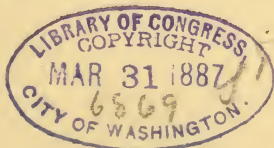
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Is. LXVI: 1. Thus saith the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest?

I CHRON. XVI: 29. Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

Is. LX: 13. * * to beautify the place of my sanctuary.

Ex. XXVIII: 2. * * holy garments for Aaron * * for glory and for beauty.

ST. JNO. IV: 24. God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth,

REV. XXI: 18-19. And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall were garnished with all manner of precious stones.

II SAM. XXIV: 24. Neither will I offer unto the Lord that which doth cost me nothing.

PS. CXLIV: 12. That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace.



ÆSTHETICS IN WORSHIP.



THE term Æsthetics is used to express in its widest sense the science of Beauty in Nature, in Literature, and in Art. Etymologically, it refers to the impressions which are received through the senses; and if we combine its abstract and its philological meanings, we may define its relation to worship, as including the extent to which the element of beauty or good taste, in ornament or symbolism, may be cultivated and observed in the worship of Almighty God.

But what do we include in the term worship? Evidently a distinction must be made

between the private devotions of a Christian and the public worship of a congregation in the house of God. The personal worship of the Christian believer has the sanction of the command, "Enter into thy closet and pray to the Father which seeth in secret," and its special object is to seek the guidance and strength needful for the duties of life. And whatever accessories may contribute to this result, either by association or suggestion, are certainly legitimate, and must be determined by the taste or the preference of the individual himself. A very true and real prayer may be offered up by the bedside, the table, or the chair; but this does not at all exclude the fact that another may prefer to have a *prie dieu*, at which his private devotions shall be habitually said; nor the further fact that there may be oratories in private houses set apart especially for offices of devotion, adorned with crosses and candles if you choose, provided the persons using them believe that with these helps they may better engage in the daily prayers which are the rule and habit of their life. There is

certainly no inquisitorial power in this Church to prevent their private use by any member thereof.

But this is a very different thing from the public worship of Almighty God. Here we are to seek, not merely personal benefits and inspirations, but to do homage to the great God; and the rule must expand, therefore, from the limited preference of an individual worshiper to the common consent of the entire congregation, in their united and organic act.

And here it is to be observed also, that the body as well as the spirit is to be engaged in the act. We kneel to pray; we stand up to sing; and we only sit when the act of worship, strictly construed, is suspended, and we listen to a lesson from Holy Scripture, the epistle, or the sermon. Even in listening to the gospel for the day, the rubric prescribes a standing attitude to honor by the act the words of the Master himself. And the cumulative force of a multitude of souls, gathered together in one place, with one mind and one accord, is a different thing

altogether from the secret devotions of the Christian in the seclusion of his own closet and the solitary pentecost of private prayer.

But this larger definition of worship, in its organic character and ends, demands the pre-arrangement of certain acts and offices, as well as the provision of a fitting place in which they may be observed.

“When to the exiled seer were given
Those rapturous views of highest heaven,
All glorious though the visions were,
Yet he beheld no Temple there.

“But we, frail sojourners below,
The pilgrim heirs of guilt and woe,
Must seek a Tabernacle, where
Our scattered souls may blend in prayer.”

It is this united act of many souls and its realization in the prayers and praises of many hearts in one devotional service that is contemplated by our theme.

With Æsthetics as a secular theory or an abstract system, we have nothing to do in this discussion, except as it relates to sensible impressions in certain acts and surroundings; and narrowing the subject thus to the ap-

paratus and the function of Worship, we are to discuss the position which the element of Beauty or Propriety or Impressiveness may occupy in the proper rendering of the liturgy of the Church,—whether in the material edifice, which will include the architecture and decoration of the building, the incidental accompaniments such as Music, Furniture, Vestments and so forth, or in the symbolic attitude alike of Ministrant and people.

If we are to discuss merely a question of taste in the ornaments of the Church or in propriety of attitude and gesture, we are met at once by the familiar maxim, “*De gustibus non est disputandum.*” But if we enlarge our theme to the recognition of Beauty in all that it implies, whether of fitness, mutual proportion, costliness, grandeur or mystery, it will include every essential and detail which may render more impressive, and therefore more effective, the most sacred act in which the human soul can be engaged, amid the mysteries, the inspirations and the eternal results of the worship of Almighty God.

That the element of fitness and propriety, or the mutual proportion, adjustment and harmony of parts, which we vaguely call Beauty, has a place in Worship, and that it is even intrinsic in the devotional expression of the religious idea, seems to have the sanction of Inspired Truth. The hill of Zion was "a fair place," it was "beautiful for situation," "the joy of the whole earth"; and it possessed these characteristics, simply because it was perfectly adapted to the purpose for which it was selected, and because it impressed an uncultured and semi-civilized people with sentiments of mystery, solemnity and awe far better than any abstract treatise or ethical code could have accomplished the same result. And the manifold and elaborate preparations for the worship of the true God, in the beauty of holiness, in the only Temple on Earth, of which He himself was the Architect, and of the details of whose ritual He was the Author, supply us with all the data needful to gain at least a glimpse of the divine idea which underlies our theme.

Taking, therefore, our hint from the in-

timation of Holy Scripture, the Place itself must be selected upon the principle of beauty for situation. If this was the glory of the hill of Zion, it was also, by a kind of intuitive perception, the distinguishing characteristic of the high places upon which idolatrous honors were paid to other gods in the hill-worship of the Gentile nations. By the same intuitive perception, the Grecian Temple was the crown and culmination of the hill upon which it was built; and the relics of pre-historic tribes in our own West and South indicate a similar law of selection.

In our time, we are limited by the obligations of expediency; the poverty of the worshipers; the prospect of an appreciation in real estate; and the unwillingness of the people to "ascend the hill of the Lord," or even to go to his House more than once a week, on a dead level, unless enjoying the luxury of a private carriage or the convenience of a street-car passing the church's door; and with the wise financial foresight which anticipates the changes of values, the location of churches alike in crowded cities

and in frontier Western towns is decided far more by the natural probability of an advance in the value of adjoining lots when needed for the convenience of an increased population than by any Æsthetic fitness for the sacred purpose to which they are devoted.

Next to location comes the problem of the Architecture of the building itself; and its solution may vary from the rude and rectangular meeting-house, up to the most ornate and complete edifice, whose lines and curves and angles are in just artistic proportion, and whose finished result is itself a sacrament of beauty. It may be the plain and familiar structure, whose weather-boarded sides and square, green shutters were the fitting home of the old "three-decker" arrangement of altar, prayer-desk, and pulpit; or it may be the Gothic church, with nave and transept, and choir and chancel, where every arch is a line of beauty, and whose "dim religious light and long-drawn aisle," with the effigy of Apostle or Martyr in its niches and the glory of a traditional or

legendary sainthood in its windows or upon its walls, may make the very atmosphere of the place an inspiration to faith, and be to the devout worshiper a vestibule of heaven.

These, however, are but the outward and distant approaches of the soul in its aspirations to the shrine where those aspirations are satisfied. And, therefore, we come to the more frequent and commonplace surroundings, incidents, and accessories of worship, whose observance week by week, and, in some instances, day by day, is contemplated in the phraseology of our theme.

The appropriate and impressive rendering of the Church's service, shall it be in bald and naked simplicity, as mutilated by the iconoclasm of Continental Reformers and Anglican malcontents? or shall it, upon the other extreme, involve a Ritualistic attention to genuflexions and attitudes which may imitate, if it does not servilely follow, the meretricious adornments, the gaudy decorations, and the artificial unreality of a mediæval tradition and a foreign obedience? or, at what point between these two is the best

combination of beauty and truth to be found? This is the practical direction to which the discussion of this theme must naturally tend. Inevitably, the question will receive varying answers, according to the financial ability and local traditions of parishes, and the differing tastes of men.

One thing, at least, is certain, that the worship of this Church is not spectacular in its first intention. It does not seek so much to convey impressions through the senses, as to manifest the truth to the intelligent conscience and the earnest heart.

And yet, on the other hand, it is very far removed from being merely a sort of sacred lyceum in which the sermon overshadows everything else. It recognizes all the elements of worship, and it is only in its appropriate place that the devotion becomes doctrinal. It honors the reading of the Inspired Word, and makes ample provision for the administration of the sacraments; and its ordinary arrangement of the chancel, with the Pulpit on one side for the uninspired Preacher, and the Lectern on the other with the open Bible

upon it, the prayer-desks in their place in the choir of the chancel, and the altar within the sanctuary, implies that the whole service is constructed upon the idea of a progressive advance in elevation of soul and a higher recognition of the mystery of the Infinite, from the deep abasement of the opening Confession to its liturgical culmination in the Blessing of Peace.

Deeply impressive as every approach of a worshiping congregation to God must be, yet magnificence of ceremonial is not essential to its success. It is only occasional in the system of the church; and then it grows out of surrounding circumstances and necessities; and is impressive both to spectator and participant, because the elements of grandeur and solemnity are inherent in the function. But this is exceptional, and possibly incidental. The question before us is: What place has the element of beauty or of taste, of costliness or of mystery, impressiveness of architectural or ritual surroundings, or symbolism of attitude and gesture, in this well-worn and variously

rendered Liturgy of ours, beginning with the "Dearly Beloved," and ending with the prayer of St. Chrysostom or the benediction of the Eucharistic Office ?

Evidently, the specific answer must vary, first, with the special season of the Christian Year. What would be fitting and appropriate amid the penitential heart-searchings of Ash-Wednesday would be quite out of place on Easter Day. The minor tone of the Advent Season, or of Lent, could be no echo of the Church's joy as she exults in the Resurrection triumph of her Lord. The commemoration of Good Friday, in the enshrouded sorrow of the soul, as it contemplates the agony of the tremendous sacrifice, must be quite a different function from the joy of Christmas, the mystery of the Ascension, or the sweet and tender associations of the Pentecost. The festivals of our Blessed Lord in the Incarnation are naturally richer and more impressive than the festival days of Apostle or Saint or Martyr ; as they, in turn, are more so than the lessons of duty through the long season of Trinity-tide. And it is

but natural that the devotional idea in these varying seasons should clothe itself in richer or more somber garb, as the occasion may require; and that in the vestments of the Priest, the decorations of the Altar, the Ante-pendea of Pulpit and Lecturn and Credence, as well as in the musical rendering of the service, there should be some symbolism and suggestion of the dominant thought of the day.

In addition to this, we meet just here the differing shades of opinion and taste; of conviction and conscience (the name which men sometimes give to their prejudices); the variety of standard, both in the priesthood and the laity, which naturally belongs to a comprehensive branch of the Church Catholic.

What does a Rubric mean, and how shall it be observed? If the ministrant be an unimaginative person, bound down by literal construction to a precise mechanical obedience which knows no liberty even within the limits of law, it will mean one thing; but if he is alive to the influences and inspirations

of beauty and taste, it may mean quite another. And here the "*de gustibus non est disputandum*" comes in with tremendous force. It may mean a hasty rattling off of prayers read from a book, with an occasional chant thrown in, the whole constituting a somewhat tedious and prolix introduction, which must be endured by the congregation as a prelude to the flights of oratory and the scintillations of eloquence which the sermon is to furnish; or it may mean the gradual approach of the soul to that most sacred function in the Church of God which commemorates the atonement once made for the sins of the world.

The theme naturally narrows to the practical and actual present. In this heterogeneous, earnest and only half-trained life of ours, where can the element of beauty find a place? and how shall it be saved from grossness and excess? Manifestly, the element of fitness, of cost and of relation to ability and purpose, must help us to the answer. What would be a sinful extravagance in one parish might be but a judicious expenditure in another.

Arrangements which might gratify the taste of one congregation might also by their presence seriously disturb the devotions of another. And the adjustment of ornament to use is quite as important also, as its adaptation to the worshiper. The adornment of the Vestibule must be a different thing from that of the nave ; and both nave and transept should be subordinate in richness and splendor to the Chancel and the Sanctuary. The Furniture, of whatever sort, should be the best and costliest which the worshiper can afford. The sacred vessels should be of the purest metal, and, if practicable, enriched with jewels and precious stones. The vestments of the Priest should be of the finest linen and needle-work, well-fitting and always scrupulously clean. The books of the service should be of the clearest type, the richest binding, and the fairest page. The altar-linen should be finer and better than is ever found in domestic use, and its sacred character should be indicated by expressive symbols woven into its texture, or added afterward by skillful and loving hands. And the

entire function should be as far removed from the artificial and meretricious, on the one hand, as from an unrelieved and repulsive barrenness upon the other. The Music should have a distinctly sacred character, and it should be accepted as an axiom that an operatic air in the choir is as inappropriate as a political harangue in the pulpit, and the distinction between the secular and the sacred should be marked from beginning to end.

There may be a fair protest against artificial flowers made of tissue paper and strung on wire, as fitting adornments of the church, and, in the opposite extreme, there may be a suggestion of excess in transforming a preaching platform into a conservatory of exotics; but there can be no question, in reasonable minds, as to the propriety of decorating God's altar with the fairest products of His own creation. The incredible iconoclasm which would forbid the use of flowers to brighten our Easter joy, and which would enforce the narrow prejudice by fulminating petty ecclesiastical bulls against the

usage, is so far removed from all true appreciation of beauty, that it does not come within the limits of our theme. It belongs to a domain, if there be one, where the Ugly alone is deemed sacred.

The Crucifix, with the effigy of the dying Christ upon it, is the emblem of an unfinished Agony, and can only be appropriate upon altars whose theology has defined the sacred mystery in accordance with that thought. But the simple cross upon the Altar is the emblem of a completed sacrifice, made once for all, for the sins of the world, and which can never be repeated. And its vacant arms become the reminder that He who once endured its bitterness and shame is now ascended into the Heavens, where He ever liveth to make intercession for us.

If it were permissible to enter into details, we might add that propriety of demeanor, as a matter of taste, may be gained by avoiding the extreme of ostentatious attitude and a fussy reverence on the one hand, and the slovenly carelessness on the other, which is sometimes seen, clad in a soiled and rumped

surplice, surmounted by a badly-fitting stole or scarf, and both flowing apart to the exposure of nether extremities, unprotected by a cassock, and culminating in unpolished boots. Certainly as much attention may be paid to appropriate attire when we enter the audience chamber of the King of Kings, or approach His Holy Table for the Sacred Feast, as we would observe at the table of an earthly friend who entertains us, and for the occasion of which we carefully arrange our best attire, and deem it the height of rudeness to leave the banquet before the other guests have finished their repast; and where it is not even considered too great a tax upon patience to wait until all the covers have been removed and the crumbs swept up by the servant of the occasion. The analogy will doubtless interpret itself.

As to stoles, whether black, white, or colored, that is an undecided question. The white stole and the black have the sanction of the Ritual Commission, though not of formal action by the legislature of the Church; but it is almost an in-

stinctive discrimination which requires that the Vestments of the Priest at a Marriage should be different from those at a Funeral; and that the somber garb of the Penitential Seasons should assume a brighter hue on the joyous and triumphant festival days of the Church.

In recent years there has been a wholesome advance in all that pertains to propriety and reverence in worship; and an equally wholesome relief from the bondage of religious prejudices, which once attached a theological significance to many a reverent act and beautiful custom which they were never intended to convey. Surpliced choirs are no longer identified with one particular school of churchmanship, but are coming to be recognized as the most effective method of achieving the result of Common Praise in a church whose liturgical glory is the use of Common Prayer. The old quartette choir has disappeared from the worship of the Church, as its predecessor, the parish clerk, had disappeared before it came; and both, for the simple reason that each was a proxy

monopolizing the responses and the singing which belonged by right to the congregation. The Academic gown, with its stately dignity as a University dress, its inconvenience for use and its false symbolism as an ecclesiastical vestment, has almost disappeared from our pulpits, and doubtless for two reasons. First, because it is more clearly perceived to-day than it was even a quarter of a century ago, that the Priest does not cease to be a Priest when he enters upon his Prophetic function, and that in preaching the Gospel he is, above all things, an "ambassador of Christ, beseeching men in His name to be reconciled to God," and bearing the distinct message authorized in the great Commission, and therefore upon a very different plane from the Professor in his lecture-room, the advocate at the Bar, or the Lecturer in the popular Lyceum. And second, because in the thorough awakening of her missionary spirit, in the same period, her pioneers in their work upon the frontier, officiating in school-houses, hotel parlors, and public halls, without the convenience of a vestry-room,

and with only a valise in which to carry the paraphernalia of their office, as well as the necessary changes of clothing for long missionary journeys, have found it impossible to carry two vestments where one would suffice, and inconvenient to use both even if they could carry them. And for these utilitarian reasons, more than for any Æsthetic purpose, this little bit of pure and unadulterated Gospel Ritualism has disappeared from sight. Contemporaneously, the traditional Bands, which really belong to the Barrister as much as to the Parson, have faded away with the old-fashioned white neck-cloth of the clergy, which itself had previously been abolished from general use as the prevalent cause of the disease formerly known as "Clergyman's sore throat."

And so in many ways the Utilitarian and Æsthetic have combined in effecting the changes of recent years, and the outward expression of religious sentiment in a ceremonial and artistic form, with the view of impressing the mind through the imagination and the senses, as well as "by the manifestation

of the truth to every man's conscience in the sight of God," has come to be recognized as a legitimate and powerful religious force. There is a growing recognition of the *Æsthetic* influence of architecture, painting, sculpture, music, and eloquence, and in older and wealthier communities their culture and art must sooner or later pervade their religious worship, as well as their social and domestic life. The culture which has already invaded our homes cannot be kept out of our churches, and though in many instances it may assume a very crude and grotesque shape, yet the ultimate result will be the survival of the fittest, and the test of time and use will decide what is worthy to remain.

The only canon possible on the subject must be one so universal in principle and yet so flexible in application, as to meet the case of all classes and conditions of parishes and men. It is simply this, that in the adornment and beautifying of our material surroundings, we should devote to the service of Almighty God that which is most beautiful and most precious in proportion to our taste

and our means. If David could not live in a ceiled house while the Ark of the Lord stood in a tent, we certainly have a hint of the proportionate relation between the Home and the Church. And we have by easy inference also, a rebuke of that pious meanness which decorates the parlor with all that is beautiful; which covers the walls of the home with paintings and fills its rooms with the rarest products of art; which frescoes its ceilings with polychrome and carves its entrance with the sculptor's masterly skill,—and which is satisfied at the same time that the House of God should be forlorn and barren in its emptiness and coldness; a neglected and cheerless spot, without the warmth of color on its walls or the glow of beauty in its windows; in a word, without a hint of that costly self-sacrifice which would be at once a protest against a bare utilitarianism and an acceptable offering to God.

A true Æsthetic spirit will find its highest expression in the unknown and unrecognized qualities which escape the vulgar gaze, but which, we may believe, are not unnoticed by

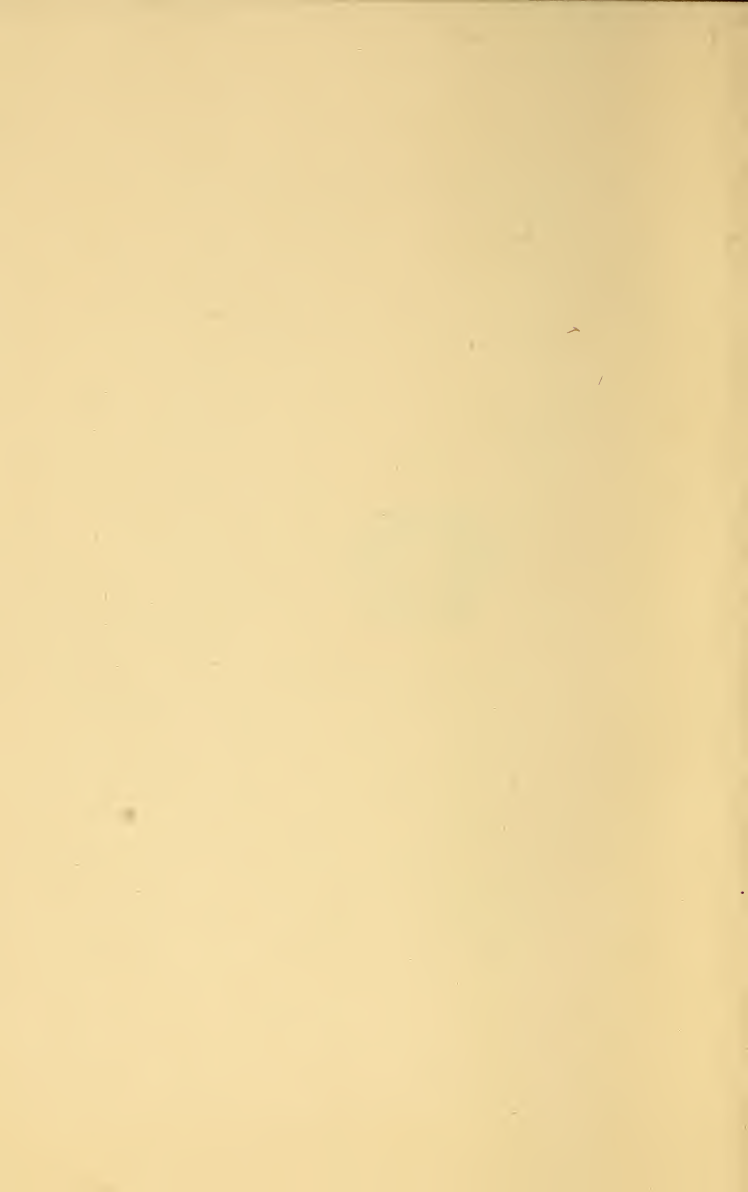
Him who clothes the lilies of the field with beauty and who decorates the sunset with its gorgeous hue. In texture and quality it will provide for the service of the sanctuary the highest expenditure of means and the most successful products of artistic skill. In the domain of attitude and gesture it will seek to be reverent, not by an outward and mechanical mimicry, but as the spontaneous expression of the devotional thought in the mind and the penitential feeling in the heart, and, both in Priest and People, it will seek to cultivate a demeanor that will be appropriate to the solemnity of the function, without being either a spectacular formalism or a dramatic pantomime.

The *Æsthetic* element must necessarily vary with the taste, the ability, and the opportunities which control its cultivation. In any case, it can only be an incidental factor in Divine Worship, never a dominant force or a final aim and end. The element of beauty ought never to be enshrined as a goddess where it should only serve as a handmaiden. Grace of gesture, propriety of style, rhetorical

accuracy of expression and rubrical precision of act must all be subordinate to that deep sincerity of heart and earnestness of purpose which discriminate between a prescribed order and a mechanical formalism ; which find in the Church's Liturgy, not the crutches of a limping devotion, but the wings upon which the soul may soar into communion with the Infinite, and which delight in the symbolism of the BEAUTIFUL, only because, at the same time, it is the symbolism of the GOOD and the TRUE.











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